

**METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR CORRELATING
FLIGHT IDENTIFICATION DATA WITH
SECONDARY SURVEILLANCE RADAR DATA**

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METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR CORRELATING
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CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

5 The present application claims priority from
Provisional U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 60/113,169,
filed December 21, 1999, entitled "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR
CORRELATING FLIGHT IDENTIFICATION DATA WITH SECONDARY
SURVEILLANCE RADAR DATA" and incorporated herein by
reference.

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15 The subject matter of this application is related to
co-pending U.S. Patent Application Serial Number 08/891,227,
filed July 10, 1997, entitled "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR
IMPROVING THE ACCURACY OF RELATIVE POSITION ESTIMATES IN A
SATELLITE-BASED NAVIGATION SYSTEM" and co-pending U.S.
Patent Application Serial No. 09/114,921, filed July 14,
1998, entitled "Method and Apparatus for Improving the
Surveillance Coverage and Target Identification in a Radar
20 Based Surveillance System", and Attorney Docket No. RANN-
0003, filed December 11, 1998, entitled "Passive
Multilateration Auto-Calibration and Position Error

Correction", all of which are incorporated herein by reference.

5 FIELD OF THE INVENTION

10 The present invention relates to the field of aircraft tracking and identification. The present invention is specifically directed toward a technique for passively retrieving and correlating aircraft data from existing aircraft data sources.

15 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

20 The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires all passenger carrying aircraft over 30 seats be equipped with so-called "Mode S" transponders. Mode S transponders are capable of transmitting a number (e.g., 25) of formats of coded data. This coded data includes such information as a unique 24-bit binary address for each aircraft.

The aircraft registration number may be derived from this 24-bit binary address. The coded Mode-S data also

includes such information as aircraft altitude and is transmitted continuously throughout a flight at a minimum rate of 1 Hz (i.e., once per second). Coded Mode-S data may be collected passively without any connection to air traffic control equipment.

The FAA has endorsed the Aircraft Communications Addressing and Reporting System (ACARS) system, which uses various data link technologies including the VHF communication band, HF and SATCOM along with a ground station network to allow aircraft to transmit and receive messages of coded data. Many domestic and international carriers have equipped their aircraft with ACARS equipment.

ACARS equipment is capable of transmitting a number of types of coded data. ACARS currently uses frequency shift keying (FSK) as a modulation scheme, however, other modulation schemes including minimum shift keying (MSK) and time division multiple access (TDMA) are being evaluated for future improvement of ACARS. ACARS data includes such information as the aircraft registration number and airline flight identification number (flight number).

ACARS transmissions from a single aircraft may be sent at varying intervals from as little as no transmissions in a single flight to several transmissions per minute. ACARS transmissions may be collected passively without any connection to air traffic control equipment.

None of the currently used or planned Mode S downlink formats provides for the transmission of flight identification data. There are a number of methods including Automatic Dependent Surveillance - Broadcast (ADS-B) and multilateration which allow for the precise determination of aircraft location through the Mode S downlink formats on a frequent basis. ACARS transmissions, while capable of encoding aircraft position and altitude, are not typically used for position determination as the frequency of ACARS transmissions is too infrequent to allow one to accurately and timely determine the exact position of an aircraft.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention includes hardware, software, and a methodology for correlating flight identification data

with aircraft registration numbers. In a first embodiment featuring a 1090 MHz receiver, Mode S decoder, ACARS receiver, and ACARS decoder, aircraft registration numbers and other Mode S data are correlated with the current flight identification of an aircraft as well as other data provided from ACARS messages.

The present invention provides for linking (correlation) of flight identification data from ACARS messages with the data from Mode S transponder transmissions, which are more frequent and provide for real time position and altitude determination. The effect of which is to provide the same data as an air traffic controller would see on his or her screen without the need for active interrogation or connection to any Air Traffic Control equipment.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a flow chart of a process for decoding secondary surveillance radar transmissions, decoding ACARS transmissions, and correlating flight identifications from ACARS with registration details from both SSR and ACARS.

Figure 2 is a diagram of DF-11 Mode S transponder transmission data and ACARS data, indicating the position of the Mode S address from within a Mode S transmission and illustrating the association between the Mode S address and derived registration data.

Figure 3 is a diagram of an aircraft multilateration system that integrates SSR and ACARS data.

Figure 4 is a block diagram illustrating the self-learning database system of the preferred embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is now described with reference to the figures where like reference numbers denote like elements or steps in the process.

Referring to Figure 1, 1090 MHz, Mode S transponder signals are received by a receiver/decoder in step 1. In step 1, the received analog Mode S signal is converted to digital data. In step 2, the Mode S address is extracted

from the digital data. The Mode S address is then stored in a roster in step 3 and used to generate the aircraft registration or "N" number which is extracted in step 4. U. S. aircraft registration numbers may be determined directly by an algorithm, while foreign aircraft registrations may be determined by a lookup table.

The aircraft registration number from step 4 may then be used to perform a database look-up in step 5. Step 5 utilizes a database 6 which may contain details of aircraft make, model, serial number, owner/operator, owner/operator address, engine type, engine noise class, engine modifications and any other pertinent data associated with a particular aircraft. Such data is extracted in step 7.

Simultaneously or concurrently with Mode-S decoding, a receiver/decoder capable of receiving and decoding ACARS signals receives and decodes such signals as illustrated in step 8. ACARS transmission may occur over VHF frequencies such as 131.550 MHz, 130.025 MHz, 129.125 MHz, 131.725 MHz, 131.450 MHz, 131.550 MHz, and 131.475 MHz, and/or HF and/or SATCOM and/or any other data link method and/or any other modulation scheme, including VDL Mode 1, 2, 3 or 4.

Aircraft registration number and flight ID number, as well as other ACARS message details, including but not limited to, "Out, Off, On and In" reports, cockpit message reports, fuel reports, peripheral message reports and miscellaneous message reports are then stored in a roster in step 9. Data from step 9 may then be matched with data from step 7. In step 10, aircraft registration numbers from steps 7 and 9 are matched to determine flight identification number.

The flight identification number is thereby associated with the corresponding aircraft registration number as a result of step 10. If there is no correlation between registration numbers from steps 7 and 10, the data may also be stored. The resultant information from steps 7, 9, and 10 may then be displayed locally over a display terminal in step 11 and/or distributed to remote locations via communication links as illustrated in step 12.

Referring to Figure 2, a DF-11 Mode S transponder transmission 21 is received and aircraft Mode S address 22 is extracted. Mode S address 22 is either converted to a U.S. aircraft registration number 23 through an algorithm or determined to be a non-U.S. registered aircraft whose

5 registration can be looked-up from a database. Data 24 associated with a particular registration number, such as aircraft owner, make, model, and serial number may then be looked-up from a database. Aircraft altitude 25 may be decoded from other Mode S transponder signals which include altitude information.

10 Simultaneously or concurrently, ACARS messages are also received and decoded and data such as aircraft registration 26 and flight ID 27, as well as all other ACARS message data is stored in a database and memory. All the aforementioned data available from the Mode S transponder transmission may then be correlated with ACARS message data by matching registration number 23 from the SSR decoder with registration number 26 from the ACARS decoder.

20 The resultant correlated data, as illustrated in Figure 2, contains a host of information specifically identifying an aircraft. Such information, when correlated with multilateration data, can provide a complete and accurate picture of aircraft identity and position. Such information may be useful to an airline in tracking individual aircraft for business planning purposes. In addition, such information may be used for ground tracking purposes (e.g.,

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for noise abatement verification). Moreover, such data may be re-transmitted on a data channel to other aircraft to provide a real-time display of aircraft in the vicinity.

5 Referring to the embodiment depicted in Figure 3, the integration of ACARS and SSR data is shown with an aircraft multilateration system. Aircraft 300 transmits SSR signals 301 at least once per second. SSR signals 301 may be received at one or more of multiple ground stations 302. The time of arrival at each ground station is determined by reference to a standard time reference provided by GPS signal 306 from GPS satellite 320.

10 One or more of ground stations 302 may then send time stamped SSR data 303 to central workstation 304. Time stamped SSR data 303 includes the Mode S address of aircraft 300 which is unique to every aircraft and can be correlated to a registration number. At central workstation 304 a processor then calculates the position of the aircraft using difference time of arrival (DTOA) techniques. The aircraft's location and registration number are then known and can be displayed to a user.

Also at the central workstation 304, ACARS data is received and modulated, providing a roster or look-up table between registration number and aircraft assigned flight number. Thus, the entire system provides an independent air traffic control picture complete with aircraft position and identification by flight number, using only passive radio reception techniques.

In a preferred embodiment, an adaptive or learning database of aircraft registration information and related details may be implemented as database 6 of Figure 1. One difficulty in decoding an aircraft Mode S address is that one may not be able to match every address to a unique aircraft identification number without having either a look-up table or conversion algorithm.

For example, in some instances, an aircraft might be brand new and not in the present database or the look-up table might not be available from a particular country of origin. It should be noted that unidentifiable registrations for these reasons are expected to be the minority of aircraft. However, for reasons such as noise monitoring, it may still be important to identify all or as many aircraft as possible.

For this reason it is advantageous to have a database of aircraft Mode S addresses and registrations which may be updated regularly, such as in the preferred embodiment shown in Figure 4 for a Self-learning database.

Referring to Figure 4, a Mode S transmission may be received by a decoder in step 31, and is read from the decoder in block 32. A roster or table may be built for the aircraft in general area 33. In the example of Figure 4, because the aircraft is of foreign registration, no registration look-up is available as illustrated in step 34. However, the country of origin is known as are other details provided by Mode S decoding process 37.

Meanwhile, an ACARS receiver receives and processes ACARS data in step 35 and a table is built in step 36 matching flight number to registration, and other details, based solely upon the ACARS information. Also, details on a particular aircraft may be known from the registration number, by looking up in other commercially available databases, such as the OAG schedule in step 38.

Based on the spatial and other information, a best estimate is made of the match between the aircraft Mode S

address and a registration number in step 39. The new registration/mode S look-up is then entered into the database 40 for future use.

5 Since many foreign aircraft may tend to visit the same airports or airspace more than once, (e.g., routine commercial flights), the data acquired using such a technique may be accessed the next time such an aircraft re-visits the airspace. In addition, the system of the present invention may be networked to other such systems over a wide area to share such "learned" data.

10 Note that this technique may also be used to validate or correct information that is already in a database. Thus, over a period of time, database data may be corrected or upgraded. Again, such data may be accessed during subsequent visits of an aircraft to an airspace, or may be shared with other systems so as to update a database for an overall network.

15 While the preferred embodiment and various alternative embodiments of the invention have been disclosed and described in detail herein, it may be apparent to those skilled in the art that various changes in form and detail

may be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope thereof.

5 It should be noted that the present invention has been described in connection with the preferred embodiment. However, as one of ordinary skill in the art may appreciate, elements of the invention may be practiced individually or in various sub-combinations not including all of the elements of the preferred embodiment, and still fall within
10 the spirit and scope of the present invention.

For example, in the preferred embodiment, position and identification information are obtained and displayed in an air traffic display. However, in alternative embodiments, only position or identification information may be obtained
15 and displayed. Thus, for example, identification information may be obtained using the techniques of the present invention for use in identifying aircraft in the vicinity. Position information of such aircraft may not be
20 required, or may be obtained using other techniques, including, but not limited to, conventional radar.